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CONFLICT OR COMPROMISE?

CAST OF CHARACTERS



JOHN HICKLENTON
(1967 – 2010)
CARTOONIST;
DIAGNOSED WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
2000



LINDSAY COOPER
(1951 – 2013)
MUSICIAN AND
COMPOSER;
DIAGNOSED WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
1987



JOHN "BEYER" MIERS
(1978 –)
PARANOID
SURREALIST;
DIAGNOSED WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
2016



**JOHN "BRUNETTI"
MIERS** (1978 –)
BIT OF A GROUCH;
DIAGNOSED WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
2016



**JOHN "COOPER"
MIERS** (1978 –)
DIARIST;
DIAGNOSED WITH
MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
2016

This strip is part of an ongoing project using comics to express, conceptualise and cope with my experience of living with multiple sclerosis. The first instalment was produced during a postdoctoral residency in University of the Arts London's Archives and Special Collections Centre at London College of Communication, roughly two years after being diagnosed with MS. The residency resulted in the production of an autobiographical comic, *So I Guess My Body Pretty Much Hates Me Now*, now held in the Wellcome Collection library, London, and the winner of "Best One-Shot" in the 2020 Broken Frontier awards.

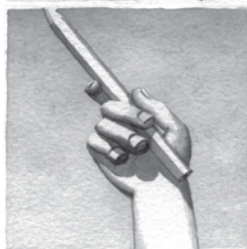
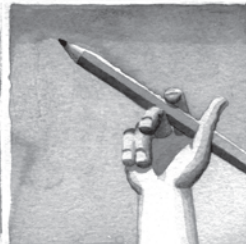
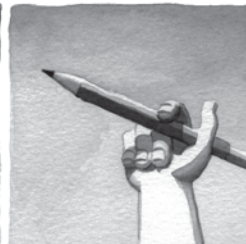
Rather than attempting to present an unmediated voice and hand as signifiers of confessional truth-telling, this comic adopted graphic languages from work held in the archive to depict episodes from my initial experiences of coping with my diagnosis and symptoms. Placing incidents from my own life into the nonsensically cruel universe of Mark Beyer's *Amy & Jordan* strips highlighted the sense of dislocation and inevitable "why me?" that follows diagnosis. Evoking the ribald underground cartooning and scatological humour of Ivan Brunetti's *Schizo* #1 enabled me to reframe a humiliating incident of loss of continence as a piece of gross-out slapstick. My self-presentation in these strips also mimicked the mood of its source material: the "Beyer me" is tentative and fearful, while the "Brunetti me" displays some of the misanthropy of Brunetti's early work.

In more recent work I've begun to address more directly my understanding of my still relatively new status as a "disabled" individual, and have incorporated aspects of my archival research that were not reflected in the earlier comic: the experiences and reflections of musician Lindsay Cooper and cartoonist John Hicklenton, both of whom suffered from MS.

This comic begins with first-person narration, but my existing fictionalised selves quickly reassert their presence, commenting on and questioning Hicklenton and Cooper's approaches to disease management and then engaging them in direct and sometimes confrontational dialogue. Despite the occasionally heated nature of the conversation, I hope that these pages stand as a record of, as Cooper recommends, trying to learn from their experiences and use them to understand what might happen to me.

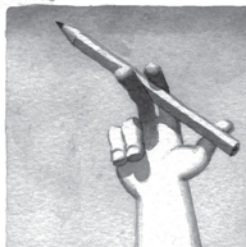


I USE THIS IMAGE AS MY
PROFILE PIC AT WORK.



I DON'T WANT TO GET
INTO SOME "OOH MY BODY
MUST HAVE KNOWN WHAT
WAS HAPPENING TO IT
BEFORE I WAS
CONSCIOUSLY AWARE"
HOCUS POCUS... BUT
IT'S WEIRD, YOU KNOW?

IT'S FUNNY WHEN I LOOK
BACK AT THESE OLD
PAGES, WITH THEIR
FOCUS ON MINUTE
DEPICTIONS OF PRECISE
MOVEMENTS, BUT ALSO
SCRAMBLED
PICTURES OF THOSE
MOVEMENTS.



THIS IS CARTOONIST JOHN HICKLENTON. HE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH MS IN 2000.

IN A 2006 INTERVIEW RECORDED FOR THE DOCUMENTARY 'HERE'S JOHNNY', HE SAYS -



DRAWING IS MY WALKING NOW.

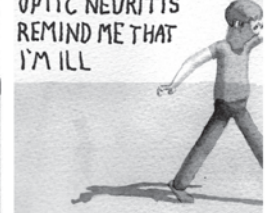
I HAVEN'T GOT MS WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING AT MY PICTURES, AND I HAVEN'T GOT IT WHEN I'M DRAWING THEM EITHER.

IT'S HARD TO WATCH THAT FILM. JOHNNY'S SYMPTOMS ARE WAY MORE ADVANCED THAN MINE.

I CAN STILL WALK, AT LEAST.



BUT NUMBNESS AND OPTIC NEURITIS REMIND ME THAT I'M ILL



EVEN WHEN I'M DRAWING.



THE STUFF THAT I DO IS SORT OF AGGRESSIVE ART, I SUPPOSE. AND I THINK THAT ALL AGGRESSION IS COMING OUT OF FEAR.

SO I THINK I JUST TURNED MY FEAR INTO A WORKABLE TOOL.

I WAS DOING IT BEFORE, WHEN I WAS WELL, BUT NOW THOSE CHARACTERS ARE REPRESENTING A DIFFERENT MINDSET.



HE DESCRIBED HIS PARTNER CLAIRE AS "LIKE A SWORD, LIKE JOAN OF ARC."

I THINK HE SEES HIS MS AS A THIRD PARTY. HE SEES IT AS SOMETHING THAT HAS A WILL AND HAS INTENTION AND KNOWS WHAT IT'S DOING. HE SEES IT AS A DEMON REALLY, AND IT DOES SEEM TO BE THAT WAY.



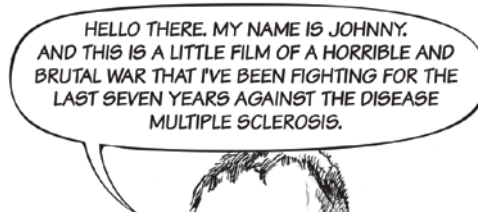
JOHNNY ENDED HIS LIFE AT THE DIGNITAS CLINIC IN SWITZERLAND ON MARCH 19, 2010, THE DAY AFTER MY 32ND BIRTHDAY. HE WAS 42, THE AGE I AM NOW.

THIS IS MUSICIAN AND COMPOSER
LINDSAY COOPER. SHE WAS
DIAGNOSED WITH MS IN 1987. ON
THE DAY BEFORE MY 16TH BIRTHDAY,
SHE WROTE IN HER DIARY -



Thursday 17th March 1994

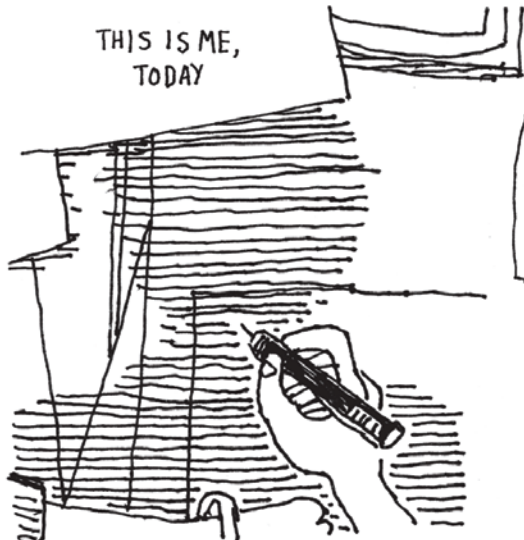
If I can feed myself properly,
if I can get some decent nights of deep sleep,
if I don't get anxious about work
this numbness + all the other symptoms
my body is kindly producing
to remind me to treat myself better
will clear up.



WHY START A WAR THAT YOU'VE ALREADY LOST?



THIS IS ME,
TODAY



FINDING A PDF OF LINDSAY
COOPER'S ILLUSTRATED DIARY



THIS IS
AMAZING



THE LANGUAGE IS MORE PLAYFUL
THAN IN THE PROSE DIARIES

IS "BRICKMOUTH"
HER MOTHER?

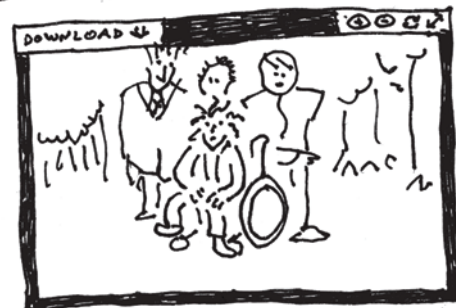


HER HAIR LOOKS QUITE
SHORT IN THESE

IF SHE'S WITH ROBYN ARCHER THEN
THIS MUST BE A YEAR OR SO BEFORE
THE DIARIES I'VE READ



OH



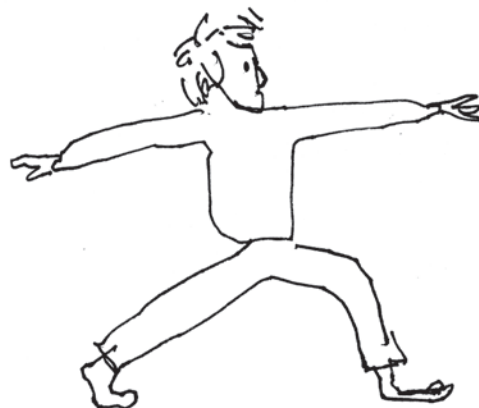
SHE'S IN A WHEELCHAIR HERE



I THOUGHT SHE DIDN'T USE
ONE UNTIL A BIT LATER



ON THAT HOLIDAY SHE TOOK IN
1992 IT SOUNDED LIKE SHE WAS
GOING ON LONGER WALKS THAN I
COULD NOW. AND RUNNING!





Saturday 9th April 1994
A visit to the Hocus Pocus shop
in Covent Garden

Lazarus reminds us
that illness is 100%
emotional in cause

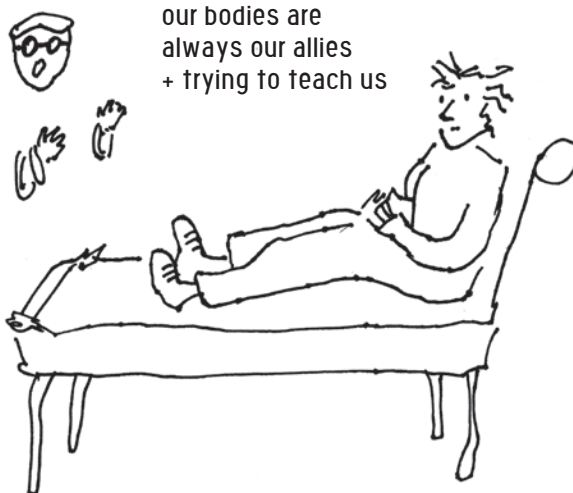


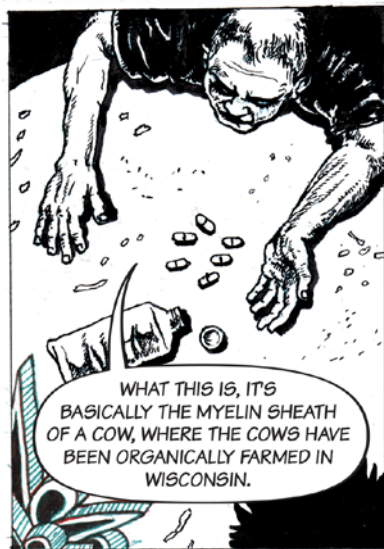
SO MAYBE I'M ADDICTED
TO IT, MAYBE I'LL LOVE HAVING MULTIPLE
SCLEROSIS WHEN MY SOUL CHOSE IT FOR MY
OWN WELL BEING. THANK YOU FOR BEING SO
BRAVE.

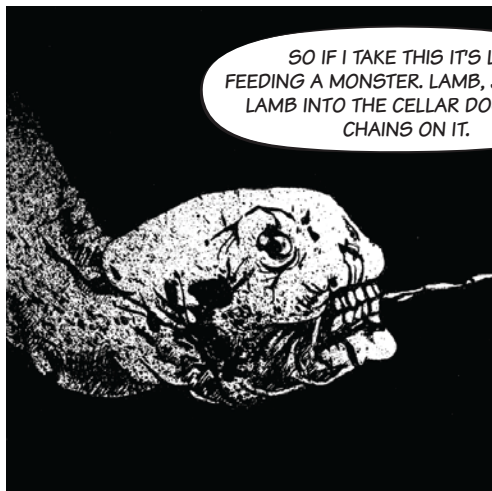
Tuesday 12th April 1994

Went to see Carola

+ she suggested lying down
+ listening to what my body had
to say. I had thought that I should try
welcoming my symptoms and that







SO IF I TAKE THIS IT'S LIKE
FEEDING A MONSTER. LAMB, JOINTS OF
LAMB INTO THE CELLAR DOOR WITH
CHAINS ON IT.



ONE NIGHT I'D HAD
ONE OF THOSE FUNNY CIGARETTES
AND WHEN I WAS WATCHING SHOPPING
CHANNEL, I SAW AN ADVERT FOR THIS.



IMPORTANT SAFETY
INFORMATION, DO NOT USE IF
YOU SUFFER FROM MULTIPLE
SCLEROSIS, IT SAYS THERE.



